

Holocaust Memorial Day 2019 Postcard Project

Notes for activity organisers



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY TRUST

Take part in our Postcard Project and encourage people at your Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) activity to write to people persecuted during the Holocaust and genocide.

This activity is suitable for adults and children aged seven and over. At your HMD activity, encourage attendees to explore one or two life stories of people forced to flee from their homes – Renee Bornstein fled during the Holocaust and Sokphal Din and his family were forced from their home during the Genocide in Cambodia. They can then write a postcard with a message to Renee and/or Sokphal.

On HMD 2019 we also mark the 40th anniversary of the end of the Genocide in Cambodia.

After your event, collect all completed postcards and post them back in a large envelope with the postcard return form to:

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust
PO Box 61074
London
SE1P 5BX

You will receive one postcard from each person your group has written to. You can display these postcards to share them with your participants after HMD.

HMDT may also display submitted postcards from your activity at the UK Commemorative Ceremony for HMD.



You will need:

- Postcards – one per person. You can download these to print out or order them in quantities of 30 for free (subject to availability) at hmd.org.uk/postcards.
- Life stories for Renee Bornstein, who fled from persecution during the Holocaust, and Sokphal Din, a survivor of the Genocide in Cambodia (in either easy to read or full formats, depending on your audience).
- Postcard return form to send to HMDT.
- *Life story map* worksheets (optional, see overleaf)
- Postcard writing station poster (optional, see overleaf)



Below are three ideas for how to include the Postcard Project in your Holocaust Memorial Day activity:

Lead a structured session for children aged 7+

Both life stories have easy to read versions suitable for younger children and those with lower literacy levels. Primary school lesson plans with PowerPoint presentations are available to help you explore Renee or Sokphal's story with younger children.

Find these resources at hmd.org.uk/education.

Lead a structured session for teenagers or adults

We have created a lesson plan and Life story map worksheet suitable for anyone aged 11+. This will help you explore both life stories in detail before writing your postcards.

Find these resources at hmd.org.uk/education.

Provide a postcard writing station

If you are organising an HMD activity, you could encourage attendees to take part independently. Set up a table with:

- Postcards
- Pens
- A postbox made from a cardboard box
- Life stories and easy to read life stories
- *Life story map* worksheets (optional)
- Display our poster explaining the project to people



Find out more...

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust: hmd.org.uk
Order an activity pack or resources: hmd.org.uk/activitypack
Resources for educators: hmd.org.uk/education

hmd.org.uk
enquiries@hmd.org.uk
020 7785 7029

 @hmd_uk
 hmd.uk

Learning from genocide - for a better future

Holocaust Memorial Day 2019 Postcard Project



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How you can get involved:

Step one

Read the life stories of:



Renee Bornstein, who fled
Nazi-occupied France as a
child

and/or



Sokphal Din, who was forced
out of his home during the
Genocide in Cambodia

Step two

Write a postcard to Renee or Sokphal, telling them:

- How their story made you feel
- What you have learnt from their story that you didn't know before
- What you have been inspired to do in your own life after hearing their story



Step three

The organiser of the activity you are at will send all postcards to Holocaust Memorial Day Trust who will distribute them to Renee and Sokphal.

Step four

The activity organiser will receive a postcard in response from Renee and Sokphal, which they may display after Holocaust Memorial Day. Do try and pop back to see the messages received.

Find out more: hmd.org.uk

Holocaust Memorial Day 2019 Postcard Project

Activity organisers return form



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Once you and your group have completed the postcard activity, please fill in the form below in order to receive response postcards.

You are welcome to include some or all of the postcards written by your group to be passed on to the survivors. However, if you would prefer to keep them for a display or similar, please still complete the form and let us know. Without this information we cannot send you a return message.

Please send your form to:

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust
PO Box 61074
London
SE1P 5BX

Your name	
Your organisation or group	
Address to send return postcard to	
Telephone number	
Email address	
Date of postcard activity	
Age range of participants	
Information about your HMD activity	

HMD local activities map

Share what you have done to mark HMD on our interactive map, and be part of the national picture of how organisations and communities across the UK are commemorating the day. You can mark your event as private if it is not open to outside visitors.

Visit hmd.org.uk/letusknow to complete the short form.

Form continues overleaf

Thank you for marking Holocaust Memorial Day 2019.

Permission to store data and contact you:

- Please tick if you are happy for the information submitted above to be stored by HMDT on our database.
- Please tick if you are happy for HMDT to contact you with information about support available for organising an HMD activity in the future.

HMDT's full privacy policy can be viewed at www.hmd.org.uk/privacy.

Find out more...

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust: hmd.org.uk

Renee Bornstein



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Renee Bornstein survived the Holocaust by hiding in barns, farms and convents. Marianne Cohn, a resistance worker, was murdered by the Gestapo for trying to help Renee and other children escape.



'When you are in hiding and when you are arrested, you live in fear and confront death every day. How could I be a child again?'

My name is Renee Bornstein, née Koenig. I was born in Strasbourg, France in 1934. When I was five years old, I moved with my parents, my older sister, Helen, and my younger brother, Joe, to the small town of St Junien, in the south west of France.

When the Nazis occupied France, life for Jewish people like us became more difficult. Our daily life was restricted and people started to vanish. Whenever my parents heard the Nazis were about to search the village, my parents would rush us from our beds to hide in barns, farms, convents and even the cellar of a local chapel. Can you imagine how it felt, as a child of just eight, huddled in a dark attic or a barn, unable to make a sound? Even a creak in the rooms above or below meant the possibility of discovery, or even betrayal.

As the Nazi regime tightened its grip over occupied France, it became clear to my parents they could no longer rely on this plan for survival. They made the agonising decision to send us to Switzerland without them. We were given false papers and joined with other so-called non-Jewish children; the story was we were going to a holiday camp to escape the bombing.

We were hidden in a Catholic convent in France for two weeks. I was very frightened and I missed my parents desperately. I refused to eat and could barely sleep. I kept close to my brother and sister. One day I remember peering through a crack in the window to see SS officers milling around on the street below. For years afterwards whenever I saw a man in uniform, it would send shivers down my spine.

From there we were taken by train to Lyon and hidden in another convent, before heading to a secret crossing point at the Swiss border. It was a tense journey. Nazi officers prowled the crowded carriages. The Gestapo were everywhere.

Near the Swiss border, our group was joined by a Jewish Girl Guide and French Resistance worker, Marianne Cohn. She organised a lorry to take us to our destination. In the lorry, my sister Helen swallowed the Swiss money my parents had given us in case the Nazis found it.

As we approached the border a lorry of Germans appeared with barking dogs. A boy from our group tried to escape, but was thrown back into our lorry. He cried out: 'I'm not Jewish! I'm not Jewish!'

Marianne and the lorry driver repeated our story of the holiday camp. They left us alone, but when we arrived at Pas De L'Echelle, a French village near Geneva, they returned. The German officers asked endlessly 'Are you Jewish? Are you Jewish?' We said no but it made little difference; we were sent to Prison Du Pax in Annemasse, France. As we arrived my sister said: 'You no longer need to save your dress for Shabbos, because we are all going to die.'

After a few days, we were taken by the Gestapo chief commandant Meyer and his associate to a big, empty room for questioning. There was a boy lying down, curled-up on a plank. He had been beaten. I still remember his face and his name: Leon Sonnstein.

Meyer pointed his gun at our faces. He said: 'If you don't tell the truth, you will be beaten like him. Are you Jewish?'

Again and again I said no. I told him my name was Renee Blanchee. I gave a false address and I made up names for my mother and father. Eventually, he let us go and we returned to our cells.

Every morning Marianne was taken for questioning, every evening she returned with a red and swollen face. She was subjected to hot and cold baths and other torture. Her face became deformed. She had the opportunity to reveal our true identities and save her own life, but she never took it. Eventually, she was murdered by the Gestapo. A school in Annemasse, France was named after her; a tribute to her bravery in saving two hundred children.

In August 1944, about two weeks after our arrival, the Lord Mayor of Annemasse negotiated our freedom. Members of the underground movement 'Le Maki' took us to a Red Cross refugee centre at the Carlton Hotel in Geneva and after three months we were returned home to our parents. We had been apart for six months. My parents survived by going into hiding.

I lost my childhood. I never learnt how to be truly carefree.

I married a concentration camp survivor, Ernst Bornstein. We lived in Munich and had three children. When he died in 1978 we moved to Manchester. With the warmth of the Manchester Jewish community, we were able to heal and I was proud to bring my children up with Jewish identities. Manchester is my home now.

Through my children and grandchildren, I found joy in life again. I am a child of the Shoah. My family is my victory.

Find out more...

The Holocaust hmd.org.uk/holocaust

Discover the story of Ernst Bornstein, Renee's husband, and his book *The Long Night*: holocaustmatters.org

hmd.org.uk
enquiries@hmd.org.uk
020 7785 7029

 [@hmd_uk](https://twitter.com/hmd_uk)
 [hmd.uk](https://www.facebook.com/hmd.uk)

Learning from genocide - for a better future

Renee Bornstein

Easy to read life story



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Key terms:

Jewish: People who follow the religion of Judaism.

World War Two: A large war fought in Europe from 1939 – 1945.

Nazi Party: The group who were in power in Germany from 1933 – 1945, led by Adolf Hitler.

Refugee: A person who has to leave their home because they are in danger.

The Holocaust: The attempt by the Nazis to kill all the Jews in Europe.

My name is Renee. I was born in France in 1934. As a child I lived with my parents, my older sister, Helen, and my younger brother, Joe. My family and I are **Jewish**.

During **World War Two**, the German Army took control of France. Germany was led by the **Nazi Party**, who believed that German people were better than lots of other groups, especially Jewish people like my family.

Life became very hard and scary. Jewish people were being taken away and we didn't know where. Whenever the Nazis came to our village, we had to run and hide in barns, farms or cellars.

My parents knew that we were in danger and we couldn't hide forever. They made the hard decision to send us away in June 1944. I was 10 years old, Helen was 13 and Joe was 9.

First we were hidden by Catholic nuns for two weeks. I was very frightened and I missed my parents so much. I refused to eat and could hardly sleep.

We left the nuns and got on a train to the French town of Lyon. There we joined a group of 36 children. We all travelled towards Switzerland. It was a scary journey. Nazi soldiers walked up and down the trains trying to find Jewish people.

When we got off the train we were met by a woman called Marianne Cohn. She was 22 years old. She was going to help us escape to Switzerland. There weren't Nazis there and we would be safe.

A group of German soldiers appeared with barking dogs. Marianne told them we were going to a holiday camp. They kept asking us 'Are you Jewish?' We said no, but they took us to a prison.

We were taken to a big, empty room. A soldier pointed his gun at us and asked 'Are you Jewish?' Again and again I said no. Eventually, he let us go back to our cells.

Every day, Marianne was taken away and beaten. Some people tried to save her, but she didn't escape because she had promised the parents that she would not leave us children alone. The Nazis killed Marianne. I will never forget her, she was a true heroine.

Today, a school in that town is named after her. Because of her bravery, she saved 200 children.

After two weeks the Lord Mayor of the town, Jean Deffaugt, managed to get us out of prison. The Nazis let him send us to a children's home. They came every week to count us. If any children had escaped, they said they would kill all of us and the Lord Mayor. We lived there for three months.

When the Nazis left the town, we were taken to a **refugee** centre in Switzerland, where we lived for another three months. When we saw our parents again we had been apart for over six months.

The Nazis tried to kill all the Jewish people in Europe. This is known as **the Holocaust**. People like me and my family were very lucky to get away. By the end of the war, the Nazis had killed six million Jews.

I grew up to have a happy life. I married Ernst, another Jew who the Nazis had attacked, and we had three children. My family is proud to be Jewish.

When my husband died, we moved to Manchester in the UK. Manchester is my home now.

Find out more... The Holocaust: hmd.org.uk/holocaust
Other resources for educators: hmd.org.uk/education

Sokphal Din



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Forced out of his home by the Khmer Rouge on 17 April 1975, Sokphal endured hard labour in the Killing Fields and eventually survived the Genocide in Cambodia by escaping to Thai refugee camps where he lived for seven years.



'We knew that we'd never go back. We knew this is a lie. They just want to kill us. And we knew that we'd never see our father again. We kept hoping, but we knew that it's impossible.'

Sokphal was just 17 years old in April 1975. He lived comfortably with his mother, father and three younger siblings in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. His father, Deuon Din, was an accountant for the existing military in Cambodia and his mother, Pan Penh You, was an entrepreneur. Sokphal was a bright and hard-working boy, who wanted to go to medical school.

Sokphal and his mother and siblings were having breakfast at their home, when there was a knock on the front door. Sokphal opened the door to two soldiers wearing all black from the Khmer Rouge – the extremist Cambodian Communists whose army had seized the city. One soldier pointed his gun at Sokphal and threatened to shoot if the family did not leave their home immediately and get out of the city. Crowds of people were already walking out of Phnom Penh.

'We didn't ask why, didn't lock the door... Didn't think to do anything else... Didn't take anything with us.'

Sokphal's father, Deuon, was already at work in his military uniform. They had to get civilian clothes to him before he was found by the Khmer Rouge, who were killing anybody linked to the existing military of Cambodia that they had just overthrown. Fortunately, a man who worked for Deuon found him first.

Sokphal's extended family all met at his uncle's home. They travelled among the crowds without any water, and were eventually taken to a labour camp. Sokphal was forced into hard labour, seven days a week under the hot sun, in farms, fields and rice paddies. His food allowance was just three spoonfuls of rice per day. These vast agricultural areas became known as the Killing Fields, because enslaved civilians were worked to death. Anyone who disobeyed was beaten or killed.

The Khmer Rouge believed in an extremist version of Communist ideology and aimed to eliminate all social classes. They wanted all members of society to be rural agricultural workers rather than educated city dwellers, who they believed had been corrupted by western capitalist ideas. Sokphal lied, and said that he couldn't read or write and had sold bread on street corners in Phnom Penh. This lie saved his life. The Khmer Rouge searched everyone during the day and night for valuables, which were confiscated, or for identification, which could reveal a hidden past. Luckily, Sokphal had lost his ID card which showed he was a student.

The Khmer Rouge demanded that people who had worked for the old Cambodian military, teachers and the educated declare themselves so that they could be sent back to Phnom Penh to be 're-educated' for three months before returning to their families. Deuon and Pan Penh, Sokphal's parents, had to decide what to do next. Eventually, Deuon left to 'study' in Phnom Penh, believing that the Khmer Rouge would treat his family better if he obeyed their orders.

The night before his departure, Deuon told Sokphal to look after his brothers, sister and mother. As the eldest, this was now his duty. Sokphal and his mother were very close. They worked together to look after the family and keep each other going. Sokphal says she was his best friend and he would not have survived without her.

After weeks of waiting with no news from Deuon, the Khmer Rouge told them that they were going to leave the labour camp to be reunited with the rest of their family. Sokphal and Pan Penh were suspicious, but excited. However, their optimism was short lived. The Khmer Rouge led Sokphal and his family deep into the jungle where they were abandoned without food, water or tools to help them survive. The Khmer Rouge had lied and Sokphal realised that he would never see his father again.

In the jungle, Sokphal's grandmother fell ill. That night they slept under the same mosquito net, Sokphal holding his grandmother's head in his arms. As morning arrived, Sokphal realised she had passed away in the night. With great sadness, the family cremated her body in the jungle.

Sokphal was taken away from the rest of his family to work in a labour camp again. As he left in the morning, Sokphal heard his brother Kosal crying. He was only six years old and sick with malaria. Kosal cursed the soldiers for taking Sokphal away and begged him to stay. But Sokphal had to walk away in tears. Two days later, he heard that Kosal had died.

When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia on 25 December 1978, Sokphal was forced by the Khmer Rouge to train as a soldier, but vowed to himself that he would never kill anyone. Sokphal was captured by the Vietnamese Army who thought he was a Khmer Rouge soldier by choice. He was held in a brick oven with other prisoners. Sokphal thought, 'That's it. They're gonna burn us alive in here. I'm gonna die.'

Instead he was moved to a prison in Siem Reap. He was held there for many months, interrogated and tortured. Meanwhile, his mother asked extensively about her son's whereabouts and had made the journey to Siem Reap on foot, with Sokphal's little brother and sister in tow. Finally, a fellow prisoner managed to negotiate his release alongside her own, and Sokphal was reunited with his family.

Sokphal bartered clothes for gold until he could eventually afford to pay for a guide to help his family escape from Cambodia to Thailand. The journey was very dangerous – the Vietnamese could still recapture them, the country was full of landmines and the rainy season meant much of the land was flooded. Eventually the family made it to a refugee camp at the Thai border. They would live here for many years, waiting to be allowed entry to a new country.

'In the camps we were waiting and waiting and hoping that one day we would leave the camp. There is no future there, living with barbed wire around you, and we were hoping to have a good future somewhere else.'

Finally, the family made contact with a cousin in England, who sponsored them through the Red Cross. They arrived in England on 4 August 1987 and the family began to build a new life and learn English. Sokphal and his family lost all of their property and belongings in the genocide and he has only recently retrieved his birth certificate to discover his real age.

Sokphal is now a freelance translator, works part-time in a supermarket and is writing a book about his experiences.

Find out more...

The Genocide in Cambodia: hmd.org.uk/cambodia

Life stories of those affected by genocide: hmd.org.uk/lifestories

Sokphal Din

Easy to read life story



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Key terms:

Cambodia: A country in Southeast Asia.

Rebel: A person who refuses to accept the government's power and tries to change things.

Government: A group of people who run a country making the laws and rules.

Labour camp: A prison where people are forced to work as slaves.

Refugee: A person who has to leave their home because they are in danger.

Sokphal (*pronounced sock-pal*) was born in **Cambodia** in 1958. He lived with his parents and three younger siblings in the capital city Phnom Penh. His dad worked for the Cambodian army. Sokphal wanted to be a doctor.

In April 1975, when Sokphal was 17 years old, his dad had gone to work and the rest of the family were eating breakfast. There was a knock on the door. Sokphal opened the door to two soldiers. They were not from the Cambodian army. They pointed a gun at Sokphal and said the family had to leave their home right away.

Everyone in the city was being forced out and crowds of people were already walking to the countryside. The soldiers were from a **rebel** army who had attacked the **government** and taken over control of the country. They were called the Khmer Rouge.

Sokphal's dad was already at work, wearing his Cambodian army uniform. The Khmer Rouge soldiers were killing anyone they found from the old army, so Sokphal's family had to find him and give him different clothes before the soldiers did. Luckily a friend found him and he got changed and left with the family.

Sokphal's family was taken to a **labour camp**. Sokphal had to work on farms every day under the hot sun. He was only allowed to eat three spoonfuls of rice a day.

The Khmer Rouge wanted everyone to work on farms and not live in cities. They didn't like people who were educated. Sokphal lied and said that he could not read or write. This lie saved his life.

Sokphal's dad was taken away and told he could come back in three months. The night before he left, he told Sokphal to look after the family. Sokphal and his mother were very close. Sokphal says she was his best friend.

The family finally heard they were leaving the camp to see their father again. They were excited. But it was a lie. The family was taken into the jungle and left without any food or water. Sokphal realised that he would never see his father again.

People became sick in the jungle and there was no medicine to help them. Sokphal's grandmother and his six-year-old brother both got ill and died. The family were very sad and unhappy.

On 25 December 1978, the country next to Cambodia, Vietnam, invaded and started fighting the Khmer Rouge. Sokphal was forced to join the Khmer Rouge, but promised himself he would never kill anyone. He was captured and put in prison.

When his mother found out which prison he was in, she took his siblings and walked all the way there. She stood outside the fence and, when the guards were not looking, threw a small packet of rice over the fence for Sokphal.

Finally Sokphal got out of prison and saw his family again. But they were still not safe. They decided to escape from Cambodia to Thailand. The journey was very dangerous, but they made it to a **refugee** camp.

They lived there for many years, waiting to be allowed to move to a new country. Finally, the family were allowed to come to England. They arrived in August 1987. It had been 12 years since they last had a safe home.

Sokphal has made his home in Basingstoke in the UK and is writing a book about his experiences.

Find out more...

Genocide in Cambodia: hmd.org.uk/cambodia
Other resources for educators: hmd.org.uk/education